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Jelly Questionnaire

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, June 15, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

JOHN BAKER:

Now, Ruth Van Deman with more news from the Bureau of Home Economics.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

I'm not sure whether it will class as news or not today. It's all kinds of questions about making jelly--out of summer fruits.

I need your help as Lord High Questioner.

BAKER:

Lord High Ex-e-cu-tion-er (humming tune from "The Mikado").

VAN DEMAN:

That's the way--jelly is one of those things you can't be too stiff about. Here's the list--I'm handing you the list.

BAKER:

(Humming again--"I've got you on my list").

VAN DEMAN:

You must have been to see "The Mikado" last night too.

BAKER:

No, just the amateur dramatics coming out.

VAN DEMAN:

And a very good ear for music, if I might be allowed to say so.

BAKER:

Say anything you want, only bring on the jelly--rich, red jelly that sparkles like a ruby--and shakes like a--like a - - -

VAN DEMAN:

Shakes like a bowlful of jelly---

BAKER:

Good enough--a bowlful of jelly--and some hot biscuits, and plenty of butter.

VAN DEMAN:

I'll call the cafeteria right after the broadcast.

BAKER:

No, you don't. I want this home-made jelly.

(over)

VAN DEMAN:

Then you'll have to wait till the currants are ripe--or the red raspberries--or the wild goose plums.

BAKER:

Haven't you any left from last year?

VAN DEMAN:

Nary a glass. It isn't done by the best jelly makers. At least that's what Mrs. Yeatman says--and around the Bureau of Home Economics we take her word on jellies.

BAKER:

Yes, I recognize the name--Fanny Walker Yeatman. It's on your jelly bulletin.

VAN DEMAN:

Senior author, that's right. (You have an ear for names too, John.)

Yes, Mrs. Yeatman believes in clearing out the jelly cupboard every year.--Eat it up and make more, she advises. Jelly loses its bright color and fresh flavor when it's stored too long--especially if stored in a warm place. A cool cupboard, for storing jellies, is much more important than a dark cupboard, Mrs. Yeatman finds--to hold in the color and flavor of the fresh fruit juice.

But, John, we seem to be getting the jelly into the cupboard before we've made it. Maybe we better back-track a little--and go down that list.

BAKER:

Ah, yes--the list--Pectin, acid, sugar, if that means anything to you.

VAN DEMAN:

If means everything if you want perfect jelly. You have to have just the right proportion of each one. Some fruits have the right combination of pectin and acid. Some do not.

BAKER:

Can't you work a little household chemurgy and make the perfect balance?

VAN DEMAN:

Oh yes, you can add a concentrated pectin. But you have to be careful not to overdo it.

And you can add lemon juice or powdered citric acid to a juice that hasn't acid enough of its own.

And you can combine different fruit juices--currant and raspberry, for instance.

BAKER:

Make the strong bolster the weak.

VAN DEMAN:

Exactly. But it's very much better to start with a fruit that's strong in both pectin and acid. Mrs. Yeatman has the best jelly-making fruits on her list--in that bulletin you mentioned a moment ago.

BAKER:

That was in my capacity as Lord High Reference Librarian.

VAN DEMAN:

And now reverting to your capacity as Lord High Questioner--

BAKER:

Water to fruit--fruit to juice--juice to jelly.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh, yes. That was to remind me to remind everybody who wants to make jelly of the right texture and sweetness that it's always safer to work with the figures before you--a table of figures that tell exactly how much water to add to each pound of the different kinds of fruit--how long to boil them--and how much sugar to use to each cupful of the juice. Mrs. Yeatman's worked all that out very neatly. There's a table like that in the bulletin. If my memory serves me right, it's on page 5. You can check by the index.

BAKER:

As Official Checker-Up I'll do that later. But back to the list, here's--two-drop test. Sounds like a double execution

VAN DEMAN:

No, that's a safety device. The two-drop test is the standard way to tell when jelly is ready to "jell". You dip a big spoon in the kettle of boiling syrup (fruit juice plus sugar), and lift the spoon up in the air. If the last of the juice runs off slowly and hesitates on the edge in two distinct drops, the jelly is ready to pour into the glasses. And we can call it a day.

BAKER:

Wait a minute. We're not through here yet--thermometer, alcohol--

VAN DEMAN:

Oh, yes. Some people ask about using a candy thermometer to tell when jelly's done. And it is a help if you're making big batches of jelly day after day--the way they do in a commercial plant. Then you can boil up a sample first, and get the exact temperature to use on the rest. But you have to hold the thermometer just so, and read it just so. Mrs. Yeatman doesn't find a thermometer very practical for the home jelly maker.

And the alcohol. Somebody once had the bright idea that you could test the jelly making power of your fruit juice by mixing some alcohol with it--to precipitate the pectin. But unfortunately we've found that a lot of other things go with the pectin when it drops down to the bottom of the cup in a gelatinous mass.--So that test doesn't amount to much.

BAKER:

Well--to finish off--glasses--lids--paraffin seal.

VAN DEMAN:

We always use broad low glasses for jelly if we can. The mold stands up better when you turn it out on the plate. And tin friction lids are best.

VAN DEMAN: (Continued)

The modern way seems to be to put the lids on loosely over the hot jelly as soon as you pour it into the glasses. Then when it's cold, and firm, and well set, wipe the inside of the rim of the glass with alcohol. That makes it perfectly clean and dry to take the paraffin seal.

And as you pour the melted paraffin on, rotate the glass so the paraffin comes well up around the edge. Then--on with the tin lids. And may be you'd be Lord High Keeper of the Jelly Cupboard?

BAKER:

I'll guard it with my snicker snee.

VAN DEMAN:

Just be sure you keep the cupboard cool and dry.

BAKER:

I'll do it.--cool and dry--and clean as a whistle long before next summer.

VAN DEMAN:

And may I remind you as Lord High Reference Librarian--

BAKER:

Oh, certainly, the jelly bulletin.

I announce with pleasure--quick, what is that title?

VAN DEMAN:

"Home-made jellies, jams, and preserves"--and the number--

BAKER:

Oh bother the numbers that bloom on the list.

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